

## ABSTRACT

# GAME DESIGN FICTION: BRIDGING MEDIATION THROUGH GAME DESIGN AND DESIGN FICTION TO FACILITATE ANTICIPATION-ORIENTED THINKING.

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This paper will introduce the notion of Game Design Fiction, the hybridization of design fiction and game design to imagine experiences facilitating future-oriented thinking and anticipation-related reflexes for non-expert publics.

## CROSSING TWO FORMS OF DESIGN FOR REFLECTION

This paper will explore the bridges between two fields: “mediation through games” building on the theories of persuasive games (Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*, 2010) and “design fiction”, a future-oriented design discipline (Julian Bleeker, 2008).

The first field, persuasive game design, is advocating for provocative and reflexive games representing how systems work and invite players to formulate judgments about them. The second one, design fiction, argues for the use of diegetic prototypes to materialize possible futures. Design fiction has gained traction in anticipation-oriented practices as the approach illustrates upcoming socio-technological stakes by embodying questions or critics into speculative and mundane artefacts coming from near futures.

This paper will reflect on the ongoing collaboration between two French design studios, Casus Ludi - specialized in mediation through games - and Design Friction - specialized in applied design fiction; a collaboration currently experimenting with Game Design Fiction.

## GAME DESIGN FICTION: A MISSION PURPOSE

Game design fiction is building on the idea of merging codes and postures from mediation through game design and design fiction.

Facing the challenge of telling complex and systemic future narratives to an audience reaching beyond foresight experts, design fiction could use game design mechanics to build interactive artefacts prompting debates about preferable futures. Game Design Fiction envisages how video games might be extrapolating and transforming weak signals highlighted by design fictions into provocative-but-ludic experiences happening in a near future. Game design fiction could become a new form of anticipation-oriented tool seeking to engage the stakeholders in reflecting on current status quo and alternative scenarios for tomorrow.

Indeed, games, as a popular medium, could contribute in making anticipation and foresight more attractive, while offering experiences able to challenge our expectations for futures and our myths about innovations and disruptions. Video games would then become a vector to share and democratize future scenarios created by a design fiction driven approach. In this sense, Game Design Fiction can be defined as the act of producing games highlighting the stakes related to situations that haven't happened yet.

## EXPLORING THREE MODES OF INTERSECTION BETWEEN MEDIATION THROUGH GAMES AND DESIGN FICTION

Articulating the continuing experiments co-driven by Casus Ludi and Design Friction, this paper will share first insights and learning to clarify three perspectives of articulation between mediation through games and design fiction. Building on the recent literature on future games and speculative games (Stuart Candy, 2018 ; Paul Coulton and Joseph Lindley, 2015 ; John A. Sweeney, 2018), each perspective will be reviewed as following: working hypotheses, related experiment and key learning and feedback.

### 1. Using game-based codes to build design fictions and future scenarios

This first approach ambitions to make design fictions and future scenarios building more accessible for non-designers, with a special interest in fostering collaboration between different publics. Based on world-building principles inherited from video games, this hybridization is about providing playful tools to imagine shared prospective scenarios and worlds.

To highlight the potential of this perspective, we will share learning from our playful kit "*Flaws of the Smart City*" (released in 2015), a card game to explore – during collaborative workshops - the dark faces of connected urban space.

### 2. Turning a design fiction into a game

In this case, the future diegetic artefact, also known as the design fiction, is a video game. It embodies the codes of future video games to tell an interactive design fiction exploring different layers of a speculative world. This unique playful and interactive sandbox allows the audience to experience the consequences of a set of actions.

As the video game then becomes a diegetic prototype to convey speculative and anticipatory perspectives, it encompasses some unique interactive assets proper to a simulation apparatus: it allows to collect data about players' choices to map decision journeys, to extract data from players' interactions to inform or clarify options for decision-making.

To illustrate this case, the paper will present feedback and observations from the "*A month facing antimicrobial resistance*" (temporary name).

This game portrays a future newsgame (a video game-based experience playing with codes of journalism) which highlight the daily consequences of a widespread antimicrobial resistance. This approach is also drawing on the work and feedback from Rebecca Oziol on a design fiction game on the same topic.

### **3. Building a game to connect and browse between a series of design fictions**

This third perspective investigates the potential of linking different design fictions articulating a same future scenario by providing a polyphony of visions; meaning confronting different points of view about a specific speculation or extrapolation. During a single experience, the game-based interactions help the navigation within a prospective scenario and between different future situations.

Regarding this mode of intersection, we will present the knowledge learned from *"JusticAble"* during which the player is taking part into a future trial based on the idea of restorative justice. The player is then invited to connect evidence - which are materialized into design fictions - to judge the guilty of an artificial intelligence system involved in a road accident.

## **FIELDS OF APPLICATION AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES**

Game Design Fiction opens a range of perspective to support anticipation-oriented thinking and actions. As game mechanisms allow to explore the prospective worlds underlined by design fictions, this medium facilitates projection to then decide how we could reach or avoid a specific speculative situation.

In this sense, Game Design Fiction reveals to be an actionable approach as it emphasises a shift from fiction to decision and action. This hybridisation allows at the same time to collect qualitative insights to inform decisions, evaluate responses and postures when rehearsing upcoming situations and develop a form of organisational improvisation as stakeholders are trained to face uncertainty. Among the fields of application, some having been already successfully tested during previous experiments, we might mention using Game Design Fiction in participatory initiatives to design or test future public policies, or helping technology innovators to question and assess the socio-political acceptability and impacts of their new products.

The paper will review approach these future perspectives and applications with a critical perspective, discussing the limitations and biases of Game Design Fiction.